

There For You by TheMikeWheelers (jasongracefully)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Everyone is traumatized, F/M, Mike is traumatized, rated t for a single instance of cursing, they have stuff to work out together

Language: English

Characters: Eleven | Jane Hopper, Mike Wheeler

Relationships: Eleven | Jane Hopper & Mike Wheeler, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-07-06

Updated: 2018-07-06

Packaged: 2022-04-22 05:08:07

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,183

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Physical and emotional wounds remain after the events of s2. Mike doesn't want to bother El with his problems, figuring she has enough going on herself, but some things can't be kept a secret forever. Fluff & Mileven supporting each other

There For You

A week after closing the gate, Mike visited the cabin for the first time. It was small and cramped and conveniently located in the middle of nowhere, and for the first time since she returned, Mike really wondered how El had managed to stay sane the past year. He thought *he* had a rough time with grief and all, but after witnessing the complete isolation El was in for months, Mike felt like a complete crybaby for how he reacted when she was gone.

This wasn't the only time he felt like a crybaby since she came back, he'd been feeling that a lot lately. It felt like El had been through a hundred times worse than anything he'd dealt with, and she fought through it with her head held high, while he just cried into a walkie-talkie for a year.

Boys are supposed to be strong for their girlfriends (was she his girlfriend? The thought of it alone made Mike blush), but lately Mike felt like El was this powerful, sturdy badass, and he was just leaning on her for protection. It wasn't like Mike was much of a manly-man. He'd never been the strong, athletic boy his father wanted him to be, and he wasn't threatened by El's strength, but still, he wanted to be able to protect her and support her and be there for her, not the other way around.

So he'd swallowed all his crybaby tendencies. He didn't mention how upset he was when she was gone, or the nightmares he'd been having every night, or the growing bruise on his shin from when he fell in the tunnels. She'd gone through worse, and he wanted to be there for her, not whine about his own problems.

But it couldn't be kept a secret forever, especially after Mike had biked to the cabin in the middle of the woods that day, his leg was already bothering him and he needed to rest it, but didn't want to make it obvious something was wrong. When El asked him to grab her a drink from the fridge, he wasn't about to deny her, so he bit back a groan and stood up to walk across the room to get it. He thought he was doing an okay job hiding the sharp pain racing down his leg, but evidently he wasn't.

“Mike, you’re limping.”

“Huh?” He called back from the kitchen, not catching what she’d said. His face was buried in the fridge reaching for a soda, and when he turned around he nearly dropped the can.

El had silently snuck up behind him, and was now looking at him with her head tilted and eyebrows furrowed, “What happened to your leg?”

Mike was putting his weight onto his left leg, and stared down at his swollen right ankle. He’d made sure to wear long pants and socks to cover his ghastly bruise from her, “What are you talking about?”

“You were limping.”

“No I wasn’t.” Mike shuffled his feet. He didn’t like to lie to her, but it was what was right. She didn’t need to be worried about him, she had enough to worry about herself. But Mike was never a good liar, “I must have just been walking funny.”

El glared at him, and for a moment Mike was sure she was about to hit him what that “*Friends don’t lie*,” but instead she took a more direct approach. She jerked her head, and the bottom of Mike’s pants rolled itself up, exposing the different shades of purple and blue that had snaked around his shin and ankle. In a moment, her expression changed from confusion to concern.

“Mike!” She gasped, “What happened?!”

“It’s nothing...” He reached up to rub the back of his neck, averting her insistent gaze.

She glared at him, “Mike,” she repeated, more forcefully this time, “*What happened?*”

“I don’t want to talk about it.” He brushed her off, literally, walking past her out of the kitchen to head back to the couch where they were sitting before. He turned around, expecting her to follow him, but she was still standing by the fridge, tears welling up in her eyes at his reaction.

Mike sighed, "I'm sorry El, please don't get upset. It's just... it's from the tunnels, okay?"

El knew all about his trip to the tunnels. If anything, her reaction to it had just solidified in his mind not to tell her any of the stuff that had happened lately. When she found out, after seeing the tell-tale goo all over his hoodie when she got back from closing the gate, at first she was angry he had risked himself like that for her. (*"What if the dogs hurt you? What if the fire burned you? What if you didn't get out before I closed the gate and got stuck down there?"*) But after her tirade of questions, it became clear to Mike she wasn't really mad, she was just upset he had put himself in danger like that. He tried to explain that he was doing it to help her, but her reaction to that just made him feel guiltier. (*"You said you can't lose me again, but I can't lose you either, Mike"*).

After that, Mike had made up his mind, there was no way he was telling her about the one moment he really was in danger down there. His injured leg would heal eventually, and she didn't need to know what happened to it. It would only hurt her to find out. It didn't help that El was literally passed out in Hopper's arms when she had first arrived back at the Byers. She nearly died saving them, Mike wasn't going to complain about a bruised ankle.

"What happened in the tunnels?" She was looking down now, not wanting to press him on something that upset him, but her curiosity getting the best of her. She shuffled her feet, "You never told me."

Mike didn't answer at first and she continued, "If you want to tell me, that is."

He looked down at his swollen ankle and thought it over for a moment. El knew he was injured now anyway, whether he told her or not she would worry about him, and that's all he was trying to avoid. There was no point in keeping it a secret from her now, "Well, when we were down there, we were running away and I fell, and these vines--"

"Vines?"

Mike had forgotten she was never down there with them, she didn't

even know what the tunnels looked like, “It was just like the Upside Down. There were these vines everywhere, all over the floors and walls and everything. And when I fell one of them grabbed me. It squeezed my leg pretty bad, Steve had to come cut it off me.”

“Mike...” She whispered. She had made her way back next to him now, and reached out to cup his cheek.

“I don’t know why I didn’t tell you. I just... I didn’t want you to worry. And I didn’t want you to think I was weak.” He leaned his face into her palm, closing his eyes.

Her eyebrows furrowed together, “How does that make you weak?”

“It was just a vine. I should have been able to just pull it off,” Mike sighed, pulling away from her hand on his cheek and staring down at his feet, “And you got actually hurt that night, I didn’t want to sound like a wimp complaining about my bruised leg.”

El shook her head insistently, refusing to believe there was anything weak in what he did. If anything he had the worse end of the deal; she just passed out for a couple hours, and here he was, limping on a swollen ankle a week later, “You were hurt too. Are you sure you’re okay? Do you want ice or someth--”

Mike cut her off, not wanting the same lecture his mom had given him when she saw his leg. He lied and said he fell off his bike, and she wouldn’t stop nagging him to rest it, “I’m fine. It just hurts a little bit when I walk.”

“Okay, good.” She smiled. The bruise looked serious, but if he insisted he was okay, she was choosing to believe him.

He smiled back at her and their eyes met. El couldn’t help the blush growing on her cheeks when he looked at her like that, with a sparkle in his eye and a wolfish expression that made her heart feel like it was in her throat. She still didn’t understand why he didn’t want to tell her, did he really think she would see him as weak? He was anything but weak. He was the boy who time after time had protected her and took care of her and made everything okay. He was the strongest person she knew. How could he not see that?

"You're not weak, Mike. You went down there to save me and let yourself get hurt doing it. That's brave." Once again she reached up to cup his cheek. This time he didn't resist, but still refused to meet her eyes, unable to accept just how strong she found him, "And for the record, I will always worry about you. Because I care about you and want to protect you."

"But I don't want you to protect me." He shook his head, "I should be the one to be protecting you."

El wasn't about to debate him with that. She would never stop protecting him, she'd been doing it since the moment she met him, and for as long as she lived, she'd be worrying about him and doing her best to protect him and take care of him just like he did for her. That wasn't up for discussion, "Compromise then. We protect each other." She looked up at him, expecting him to continue to argue that he didn't want her protection, but he just smiled and pulled her into a hug.

"I'm sorry I'm stupid," he whispered into her hair, clutching onto her.

She shook her head, "Not stupid."

"Yeah I am," he sighed, "Sometimes I just feel like too much of a crybaby to talk to you about stuff. Like you've got enough going on yourself, you don't need me whining about my problems."

"*That's* stupid. But you're not," she teased him. The fact that he felt that way about opening up to her bothered her, but they both knew it was ridiculous.

Mike giggled at her, and El swore her heart began to speed up at it. She loved the sound of his laugh. "You're right," he conceded, and soon enough they were both giggling into the hug.

Eventually El pulled away. As much as she could stay there forever, laughing in Mike's arms, she wanted to make sure he really understood her. When she pulled out of the hug, he looked down at her, concerned he did something wrong, and she grabbed his hand, "If something is bad enough to bother you, then it's bad enough to tell me, okay? I want you to talk about me. I want to support you as

much as you support me.”

He squeezed her hand. It may be hard to open up, but he knew El really cared about him, she would never think of him as some whiny crybaby. Mike didn't have a clue how he got lucky enough to have such an amazing girl in his life, but he did know he loved her so much. “I promise, from now on I'll tell you more stuff.”

“More stuff?” Her eyebrows wrinkled together and she began to look down his entire body, expecting to see another ghastly bruise he hid from her.

“No, not other injuries. I just mean generally, like more stuff that bothers me,” He squeezed her hand again to reassure her that, with the exception to his leg, physically he was okay at least, “Like nightmares and stuff.”

“Oh,” she sighed, relieved, “I get nightmares too. You can tell me about them if you want?”

Mike smiled, “I'd like that.”

Their gaze met once more, and they both beamed at each other. Mike began to recount one particularly bad image of the tunnels that had been haunting him for the past several nights, and El listened on, intent, and reassuring him that he was okay and that she was there for him. Mike always knew she was there, he never doubted that. He may have occasional trouble actually going to her, but he always knew she was there when he needed her.

Opening up to her when he was hurt was something he needed to work on, but he always knew that when he was ready, she'd be there. And he'd be there too when she needed him. They always had each other to lean on, because that's just who they were. They supported each other, they took care of each other, they protected each other.

That would never change.